

VZCZCXRO6527
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI
DE RUEHCG #0281/01 1061052
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 161052Z APR 07
FM AMCONSUL CHENNAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0837
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2436
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0751
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 5017
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1320
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 000281

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: CLAIMS OF CIA CONSPIRACIES ABOUND IN KERALA COMMUNIST
INFIGHTING

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Two warring factions within Kerala's deeply divided ruling party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), accuse each other of manipulating the media and liberally use the choicest insult: that their media antagonists are bankrolled by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Leading the smaller faction, Chief Minister Achuthanandan is desperately trying to maintain power while his rival, the leader of the bigger faction Communist Party State Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan, is trying to take full control of the party machinery. Although a formal split in the Communist Party is unlikely, the infighting has deeply eroded the party's standing, which was high after an impressive win in the May 2006 elections. The intraparty conflict is likely to see continued rhetoric concerning alleged CIA conspiracies operating in Kerala. END SUMMARY.

ATTACK ON MEDIA OPPONENTS PART OF CPI(M) INFIGHTING

¶2. (SBU) Kerala's media has been filled lately with charges by Communist politicians that the CIA is funding media syndicates in Kerala to destroy the ruling party. Senior politicians including the Chief Minister, newspaper editors, and associations of journalists have exchanged charges and counter charges in Legislative Assembly sessions, press conferences, and the columns of newspapers. Though the charges appear plainly farcical, they are in fact part of a much more serious political infighting going on within the Kerala CPI(M).

¶3. (SBU) Kerala's CPI(M) has two major factions: one led by the Party State Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan and the other by Chief Minister Achuthanandan. Although, the octogenarian Chief Minister has tried to claim a more orthodox position than Party Secretary Vijayan's camp, the infighting has more to do with who gets to wield power and control the party's assets than any real ideological differences.

¶4. (SBU) The "official group" led by State Secretary Vijayan controls the party machinery and has a majority in the powerful State Committee. In the state cabinet, too, a majority of the ministers belong to the "official group." On the other hand, Chief Minister Achuthanandan, leading a smaller faction of the party, is more popular with the masses. In the 2006 elections, the party did not plan to field Achuthanandan. In response, Achuthanandan's followers staged demonstrations throughout the state against the party leadership. Ultimately, these demonstrations, coupled with media coverage of the unusual "revolt" within the Communist Party, forced the politburo to reverse itself. Many believe that the massive victory the CPI(M) scored in the elections was due in significant part to the popularity of Achuthanandan, magnified by the media attention he received as a result of the demonstrations and subsequent politburo reversal.

ALLEGATIONS OF CIA LINKS SPICE THINGS UP

¶5. (SBU) State Secretary Vijayan's allegations that a "media syndicate" operates in Kerala refers to a group of journalists who jointly slant their stories in favor of Chief Minister Achuthanandan. Credible media insiders inform post that journalists belonging to several newspapers have joined in an informal group that supports Achuthanandan and his group in the faction feud. References to a CIA connection to this "media syndicate" are simply to grab headlines: "The CIA link allegation is just to add some 'masala' (spice) to the story; everybody knows it is not serious," a journalist explained to post.

¶6. (SBU) Chief Minister Achuthanandan also plays the game, accusing his media opponents of ties to the CIA. But rather than going after the journalists, the Chief Minister targets media proprietors whose publications he feels consistently slant stories against him. He named two newspapers -- Deepika and the Malayala Manorama -- alleging they are on the CIA's payroll. The Chief Editor of the Malayala Manorama issued a sharp denial and is planning to go to court against the Chief Minister. A media source told post that the Deepika has been particularly stinging in its criticism of Achuthanandan, perhaps due to the fact that one of the paper's owners is a close friend of State Secretary Vijayan.

¶7. (SBU) While both sides exchange wild accusations that the others' media supporters are linked to the CIA, State Secretary Vijayan's "official group" is busy trying to weed out Achuthanandan supporters from the party's district and local committees. According to journalists, the State Secretary seeks full control of the party in

CHENNAI 00000281 002 OF 002

advance of the triennial 2008 state committee elections in order to cut the Chief Minister out of the equation. Some even believe that the official group would consider removing the Chief Minister from his post within the next year or two. The infighting has eroded much of the goodwill the CPI(M) developed with its impressive win in the May 2006 state assembly elections.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Kerala's communists frequently point out, as Chief Minister Achuthanandan did recently, that former Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote in his book "A Dangerous Place" that the U.S. government paid money to the Congress party in the 1950s to defeat the emerging Communist Party in Kerala. Moynihan's words in hand, Kerala's leftists find that branding their opponents as linked to the CIA is a quick and effective strategy in intraparty struggles. So long as squabbling continues in the CPI(M), it is likely that the rhetoric of CIA conspiracies will continue to circulate in the state. END COMMENT

HOPPER